

**AGENDA ITEM: LoC Reference Program**

**ISSUE TO COME BEFORE THE BOARD AT THIS MEETING:**

Discuss and consider options for statewide and regional reference service programs.

**Background**

At the May 2002 Board meeting, a presentation was made concerning modeling the Library of California. Included with that presentation was a bubble chart that illustrated both the current grant projects and a possible LoC build-out that would incorporate those projects. While the Board took no action to approve the chart, there was consensus that the illustration appeared to be a direction in which a fully funded LoC might be developed. Given the state of the LoC budget, further consideration of this model by the Board was delayed.

At the 2002 American Library Association annual conference in Atlanta, staff shared the bubble chart with vendors, particularly those involved with virtual reference services, linked systems, and information database providers. Vendors were uniformly interested in the model and how they could participate in its development. Staff learned that there was significant interest in continuing to develop reference service models by both vendor and library communities.

**Virtual Reference**

During the spring of 2002, staff worked with the two virtual reference projects – 24/7 Reference and Q & A Café – to determine the possibility of developing a merged statewide program. Since that time, discussions have continued, and, with LSTA funding during the 2002/03 fiscal year, a grant project is now underway to bring these two services together as a single statewide virtual reference service provider. Both services now are using the same software to provide service, and each is involved with the development of a single identity, organizational structure, and business plan.

The steering group for the development of the statewide virtual reference grant included Linda Crowe, Barbara Custen, Susan McGlamery, Mary Beth Train and Diana Paque. With the development of this grant project, participants and state

library staff became aware that a need may exist for some organizational structure that would house this statewide project. To date, each project has been under the auspices and authority of its system or region. With the combination of the two programs into a single entity, planning is now underway to merge function, programs and administration to create a statewide virtual reference service.

Following on the virtual reference group's discussions, state library staff identified other related reference and service projects in the bubble chart. These include: First Source, lii.org, and Infopeople, each of which interacts with the provision of direct or indirect reference services. A meeting is scheduled on November 6 for staff, the steering group, and representatives of these services to meet to discuss how moving virtual reference statewide impacts their services. In addition, other stakeholders in the provision of reference services are being identified and meetings are being set so that further development of statewide reference services can proceed.

Staff intends to participate in further discussions concerning the development of statewide virtual reference, integration of current LSTA projects relating to reference services, and potential service delivery models for all statewide services. Staff will continue to keep the Board informed of developments that relate to the Reference Service programs required by the Act.

**RELATED ISSUE TO COME BEFORE THE BOARD IN THE FUTURE:**

1. Discussion and consideration of virtual reference as a statewide signature program.

Relevant Committee: Access Services

